

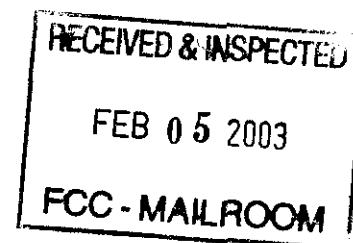
02-277

M. Christine Shaffer 3204 Martin Lane, PO Box 396, Springtown, PA 18081

January 28, 2003

Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Confirmed
FEB 02 2003
Distribution Center



Dear Commissioner Adelstein:

I am a citizen and resident of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. My township has appointed me as its representative in forming a coalition of municipalities to address cable television franchise renewals. The reason the eleven or so municipalities want to work together on this issue is because of their common frustrations stemming from lack of cable competition.

For five years I have been becoming more and more aware of the shortcomings of the Telecommunications Act. Part of the intent of the Act was to increase competition and to provide a vehicle for the creation of community media, thus for the democratization of media. However, local municipalities are at a great disadvantage when it comes to contracting with providers. Even when there were numerous smaller providers in Bucks County there was never overlap and therefore no competition whatsoever. Satellite distribution is not competition because it cannot provide public, educational, or government channels. Following all the corporate mergers there is only one provider in most of the County. Small municipal governments are no match for this large, powerful company, with its huge lobbying ability and legal expertise.

The Federal Communications Commission should recognize the unfair and inherent lobby advantage of the telecommunications industry when it argues for deregulation. The airwaves belong to the public as do municipal rights of way, and in return for the use of those public assets for private profit, the industry should be required to offer competitive choice. So long as this is not the case, subscribers will continue to get shoddy service, higher rates, decreased sources of information, and obstructions to their efforts to make telecommunications benefit their local community.

Enabling corporations to consolidate and to own most of the media forms serving one geographic area in the name of economies of scale or in the name of technology development is to disempower and impoverish the very market being served. The Federal Communications Commission would serve the public best and maximize the benefits of the technologies by regulating to promote diversity of media ownership, diversity of media content, and diversity of media access by consumers. Private monopoly of media is truly antithetical to democracy.

Sincerely,

M. Christine Shaffer
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